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INDIA ESTABLISHES BILATERAL AIR BUBBLES WITH U.S., FRANCE

International flight operations are all set to resume under exclusive agreements with countries like the US and France

FLIGHTS TO GERMANY, U.K. TO START SOON

Air France will operate 28 flights between Paris and Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru from July 18, while American carrier United Airlines will fly 18 flights to India from July 17. This arrangement is till July 31, but could be extended. Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Thursday a similar arrangement will be made soon with Germany and the UK

CAP ON DOMESTIC AIR FARE TO STAY

- From India, Air India will operate flights to the US and France
- The Civil Aviation Minister also said the cap on domestic air fare is likely to be extended beyond August 24 due to low demand
- So far, more than 6.8 lakh Indians stranded abroad have been evacuated under the repatriation exercise Vande Bharat Mission

80,000

PEOPLE HAVE FLOWN OUT OF INDIA SINCE THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

COVID CASES IN STATE SPIKE BY 4,169 IN JUST ONE DAY

TOTAL CASES 51,422

19,729 Total Recoveries till Thursday

1,032 Total Deaths

Bengaluru Urban reports a whopping **2,344** cases in a single day

- For the first time, the daily fatality count in state crosses 100
- BBMP Commissioner's PA tests +ve, but commissioner not to undergo home quarantine or get tested as his PA was on sick leave
- 45 locations with reported cases in Belagavi sealed
- Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation forms task force for awareness
- Hassan district authority sets up new Covid Care Centre P4

KARNATAKA BREACHES 50K-MARK

Bengaluru has over 25k Covid-19 cases; Ministers review facilities in hospitals, Covid Care Centres

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

KARNATAKA and its capital Bengaluru broke several records in a single day, sending the State Government scurrying to salvage the Covid-19 situation from spinning out of control.

The state witnessed the highest-ever daily spike of a whopping 4,169 positive cases, with Bengaluru alone accounting for 2,344 of these on Thursday. The state now ranks No. 4 in the country having the highest number of Covid-19 cases, and at No. 3 with the highest number of active cases after Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

In one big leap, the state crossed the 50,000-mark to reach 51,422 from its overnight tally of 47,253. Bengaluru, on its own crossed the 25,000-mark with a tally of 25,288 cases while recording the death toll at 507. Karnataka's toll on Thursday crossed the 1,000-mark with a total 1,032 deaths, although the mortality rate is at 2 per cent. The state, also for the first time, recorded over a hundred deaths in a single day at 104, of which Bengaluru recorded the highest at 70.

The worrisome trend in the state's Covid management strategy is the consistently dropping recovery rate — from 41.94 per cent on July 5 to 38.36 per cent on July 16 — and the steadily rising positivity rate (3.32 per cent to 5.55 per cent in the same period).

With this scenario staring them in the face, ministers in charge of the Covid fight in the state capital got cracking on Thursday, ahead of their meeting with Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Friday, to review measures taken to contain the virus and ensure proper treatment to patients.

In what appeared to be a coordinated effort to identify and address shortcomings in the system, the ministers visited Covid Care Centres (CCC), designated hospitals, and held a series of meetings with officials and private hospital managements.

While Deputy CM Dr C N Ashwath Narayan pulled up officials at the largest CCC on the Agricultural University GKVK Campus for overall mismanagement, Medical Education Minister Dr K Sudhakar was furious at officials at the C V Raman Nagar hospital for not following guidelines.

Ministers R Ashok, V Somanna and S T Somashekar too were in the thick of action, holding meetings with officials. MORE REPORTS: P4

With the lockdown curbs in force, traffic police stop motorists to check for violations on Mysuru Road in Bengaluru on Thursday | VINOD KUMAR T

A WORRYING SCENARIO

Thirty of the 70 people who died in Bengaluru on Thursday had no comorbidities, although most of the casualties were SARI, ILI cases with fever, cough and breathlessness. Dakshina Kannada saw the second highest number of new patients with 238 cases, followed by Dharwad with 176, Vijayapura with 144, Mysuru with 130, Kalaburagi with 123, Udupi with 113 and Raichur with 101 cases. Dakshina Kannada also saw the second highest number of deaths at seven.

Raj Cong potboiler shifts to court, Pilot says notice illegal

RAJESH ASNANI & RICHA SHARMA @Jaipur/New Delhi

CHANCES of a rapprochement between warring Congress factions in the state flew out of the window on Thursday after the rebels, led by Sachin Pilot, challenged in the Rajasthan High Court the disqualification notices issued to 19 of them by Assembly Speaker C P Joshi.

Harish Salve and Mukul Rohatgi represented the rebels, while the party fielded Abhishek Manu Singhvi. Salve called the notice unconstitutional and sought time to amend his petition. Heeding his request for a two-member bench, hearing was put off till Friday. It gave the rebels some breathing space, as the notice had sought their replies by Friday noon.

Salve basically argued that the Speaker does not have the authority to take any action on activities outside the Assembly.

Prateek Srivastava, one of the lawyers from the Speaker's side, said, "The rebel MLAs are challenging the notice on a lot of grounds. One, that the Speaker does not have the power to issue such notice. Also, they claim the Speaker has not given sufficient time. As per Vidhan Sabha rules of 1989, it has to be seven days. They say this shows malice. They have pleaded that that the anti-defection clause 10(2)(1)A is per se illegal."

The whole game appears to be to disqualify rebel MLAs to bring down the majority mark (now 101) for Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot to win the floor test. If the rebels avoid disqualification and Pilot is able to wean away a few more MLAs, the government could be in real danger. Gehlot has a razor-thin majority — just 106. As for the party high command, it is learnt to be angry with Pilot for dragging the matter to court. P9

Debate rages again over Speakers' powers

The debate over Speakers' powers under the Constitution to look at pleas seeking disqualification of MLAs has been ignited again after the Rajasthan Assembly Speaker issued notices to 19 lawmakers.

Pinarayi finally axes his tainted close confidant

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@TPuram

AFTER resisting demands for stern action against his former principal secretary M Sivasankar for almost a week, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan finally yielded to political pressure on Thursday and suspended the IAS officer for his alleged links with the accused in the sensational gold smuggling case.

Sivasankar, the biggest power centre in the government till about two weeks ago, was considered a close confidant of the CM. According to sources, the CM was hellbent on protecting his most trusted lieutenant, who was also the IT Secretary, but finally relented as his party, the CPM and other Left allies, felt that the issue was tarnishing the state government's image.

Sivasankar was suspended for violation of the code of conduct, as per the All India Service Rules. The decision was taken on the recommendations by a panel comprising Chief Secretary Vishwas Mehta and Additional Chief Secretary Finance R K Singh.

Before this departmental action, Sivasankar was only asked to go on a long leave.

The CS-led panel felt there was lack of caution on the part of the official in the appointment of Swapna Suresh, an accused in the smuggling scam. It also asked the state government to check all appointments to the IT Department.

However, Opposition UDF said it will continue with its demand for the CM's resignation.

Meanwhile, Rashed Khamis Ali Musaiqri Alshemeili, admin attache of the UAE Consulate in Thiruvananthapuram, has left the country. According to sources, Rashed, the second-in-command in the UAE's diplomatic mission in Thiruvananthapuram, flew to Delhi from Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday and reported at the UAE Embassy there. Later, on Tuesday, he flew home. The sources added that Rashed might have given explanation directly to the top diplomats at UAE's Delhi mission during the day.

PAK FOUL PLAY

UNIMPEDED ACCESS TO JADHAV NOT PROVIDED, SAYS MEA

PUSHKAR BANAKAR @New Delhi

INDIA on Thursday hit out at Pakistan for not providing unimpeded consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav and said that the Indian national was visibly stressed.

According to Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava, Pakistani officials were present in close proximity to Jadhav in an intimidating demeanour, despite protests from the Indian side. Besides, the conversation with Jadhav was being recorded.

"The arrangements did not permit a free conversation between them. The Indian consular officers could not engage Jadhav on his legal rights and were prevented from obtaining his written consent for arranging his legal representation," Srivastava said.

Jadhav, a former Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of "espionage and terrorism" in April 2017. While Pakistan claims he was arrested from Balochistan, India maintains that he ran a business in Iran and Pakistani agencies abducted him from Chabahar.

Pakistan recently said Jadhav has refused to file a review plea against his death sentence by a Pakistani military court as he wanted to rely on his mercy petition, a claim rejected by India.

"The Pakistan side conveyed that they were ready to organise consular access on July 16. We were assured that this consular access would be unimpeded, unhindered and unconditional. However, neither the environment nor the arrangements of the meeting were in accordance with the assurances of Pakistan," said Srivastava.

EXPRESS READ

Address me as 'Sir' and not 'My Lord', says Calcutta HC CJ

Kolkata: Calcutta High Court Chief Justice TBN Radhakrishnan on Thursday stated that he would want to be addressed as 'Sir' by all judiciary officers in Bengal and Andaman, instead 'My Lord' or 'Lordship', as was the practice so far.

Subhadramma Mansur, noted theatre artiste, dies at 81

Bengaluru: Eminent theatre personality and vocalist Dr Subhadramma Mansur passed away on Wednesday night. She was 81, and is survived by two sons and a daughter. The family said she developed respiratory problems, following which she was rushed to hospital, but died en route.

No job is big or small. I am not stealing or indulging in any anti-social work. We don't know how long we will have to deal with the Coronavirus, but till then, I will work here.
Prathap Gowda V S

Advocate Prathap Gowda V S dishes up some chaat at the food stall he opened at his native village, Valagerehalli, in Maddur taluk of Mandya district | EXPRESS

Lawyer chucks gown, dishes up paani puri

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @Bengaluru

HE had set his sights on entering the courtroom in a black gown and for that, he worked in a dairy, in hotels and other places while he studied law. For the last six years, he was working under a senior advocate in Bengaluru. But with courts remaining shut during the Covid-induced lockdown and with no cases before them, he had almost hit a dead end. But not the one to be discouraged, the young lawyer is now dishing up some 'chatpata' fare like paani puri and masala puri at his native village.

Prathap Gowda V S (30), a native of Valagerehalli in Maddur taluk of Mandya district, had been practising law under a senior high court advocate after completing his BA-LLB course, taking up both civil and criminal cases. "I returned to my village in March as courts were shut and only a few cases were being taken up daily online, which left me with no work. For the first two months, I did nothing. I spent time chatting with friends and meeting people. But then, I realised that the situation will not change any time soon and I have to fend for my family," he said.

Prathap got married last year and the couple have a one-month-old girl child. He realised that he could not make any earnings with his law practice, but wanted some work. "I was hesitant to ask anyone for a job as they may make fun of my education," he said. "I neither have any farm land nor property. All we have is my parental house in the village," he added.

What came to his rescue were the cooking skills he had picked up during his bachelor days. CONTINUED ON: P7

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Vision more important, says visually impaired Bokaro DC

MUKESH RANJAN @Ranchi

AN IAS officer getting posted as a deputy commissioner (DC) is no big deal, but it surely is if the person happens to be visually impaired. Jharkhand just broke new ground in inclusiveness by promoting Rajesh Kumar Singh to that post in Bokaro.

Just how rare such appointments are can be gauged from the fact that he is the first in the state and second visually impaired officer ever in India to occupy the position of a deputy commissioner. The first such appointment was made in Madhya Pradesh in 2014.

Reacting to the challenging assignment, Rajesh sought to use word play in Hindi to put his point across. The *drishtikon* (vision) is more important than *drishti* (eyesight), he emphasised.

"Everyone has eyesight, but very few know how to use it. Vision comes from experience, your inner being and the way you perceive things. Therefore, what you hear is more important rather than merely looking at things without understanding them," said the 2007 batch officer. Vision is a wider term that is more relevant for nation-building, he added.

Even to get his first posting, Rajesh had to wage a long legal battle against the Centre, which went right up to the Supreme Court. The first posting came in 2011, after the SC ruled in his favour.

Before his Bokaro assignment, Rajesh was posted as Special Secretary in the School Education and Literacy Department.

He thanked Chief Minister Hemant Soren and Chief Secretary of Jharkhand for taking the bold decision amid the coronavirus pandemic. Bokaro is also due to face a by-election soon, he added.

Though it took a lot of time for getting his first posting as also the DC's position, Rajesh is not grumpy. "In the first case, there was a sense of success, while in the second case, there is opportunity. Both are important for me," he said.

He lost eyesight while playing cricket at a very early age, but never lost hope.

My way of appreciating things is different. Definitely there is struggle in schooling, education, accessibility for the visually impaired, but all of us are struggling somewhere - Rajesh Kumar Singh

DISENGAGMENT PROCESS IN LADAKH 'INTRICATE': ARMY

China and India are committed to "complete disengagement" and the process is "intricate", needing "constant verification", the Army has said | P9

WITH THIS ISSUE CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE INDULGE 30 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)